ORIGINAL EC COMICS FROM THE 1950s!

TALES DESIGNED TO CARRY AN...

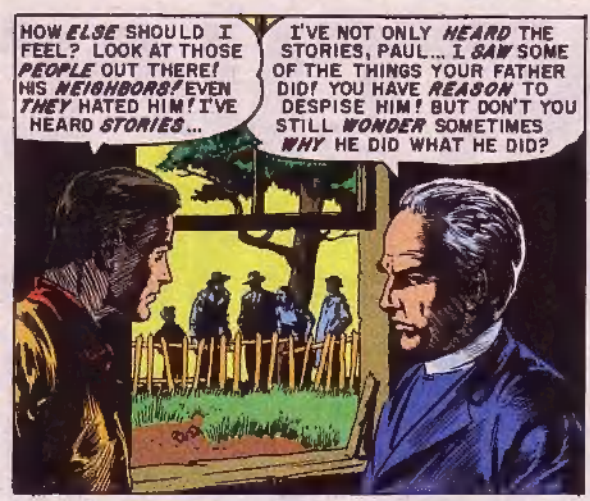
IMPACT

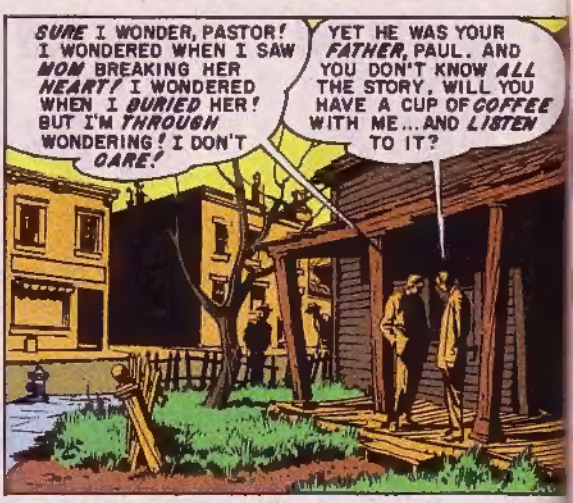
2.50
4.00
CANADA

NO. 3
JUNE

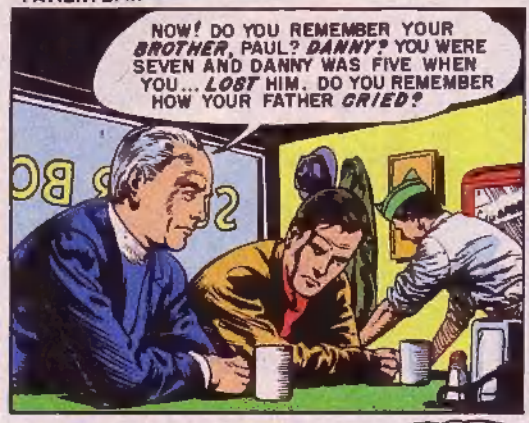
LIFE SENTENCE

THE ROOM IS A PIG-STY, LITTERED WITH THE FILTH OF THIRTY YEARS. SOMEWHERE IN THE DANK, REEKING OLD HOUSE YOU CAN HEAR RATS SCURRYING. THE STENCH CLOGS YOUR NOSTRILS. YOU STAND FOR A MOMENT IN THE DOORWAY AS PASTOR EDWARDS HURRIES TOWARD YOU, AND THERE IS NO PITY IN YOU AS YOU STARE AT THE RAGGED CORPSE ON THE SPLINTERED FLOOR. . .

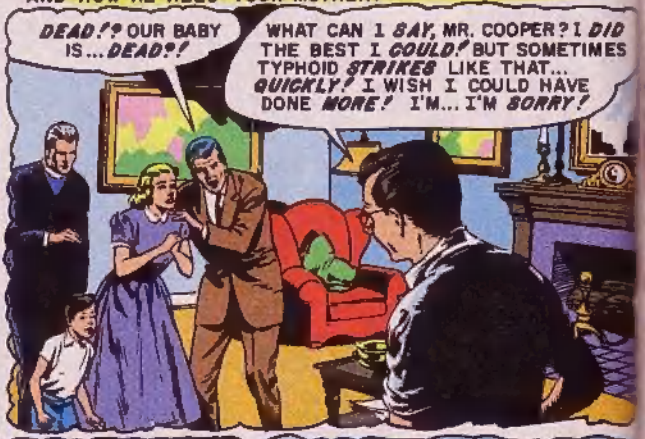




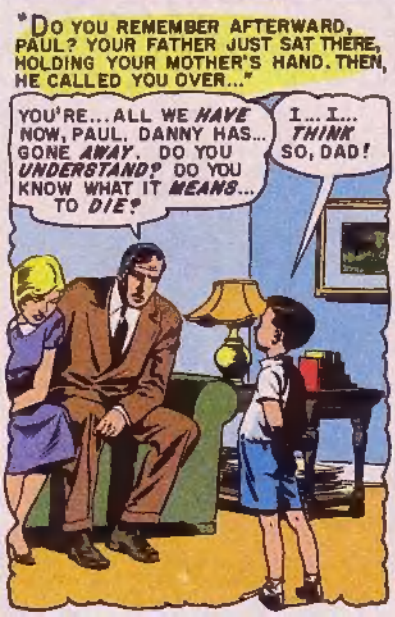
YOU DON'T WANT TO LISTEN. BUT YOU OWE SO MUCH TO PASTOR EDWARDS. HE'S BEEN PART OF YOUR LIFE FOR SO LONG. YOU WALK ACROSS TO THE COFFEE SHOP WITH HIM. AND YOU LISTEN... PATIENTLY...



"DO YOU REMEMBER HOW TALL HE WAS TILL THEN, PAUL? HOW STRAIGHT? HOW HIS SHOULDERS BENT AND ALL THE LIFE SEEMED TO GO OUT OF HIM WHEN THE DOCTOR TOLD HIM? AND HOW HE HELD YOUR MOTHER?"



"DO YOU REMEMBER AFTERWARD, PAUL? YOUR FATHER JUST SAT THERE, HOLDING YOUR MOTHER'S HAND. THEN, HE CALLED YOU OVER..."



"YOU DIDN'T HATE YOUR FATHER THEN, DID YOU, PAUL? HE CHANGED AFTER THAT. HE DIDN'T SPEAK MUCH. BUT HE WENT ON. HE RAN HIS SMALL HARDWARE MANUFACTURING BUSINESS JUST AS HE'D DONE BEFORE..."

RALPH, *MUST* YOU GO? CAN'T YOU *MISS* THIS CONVENTION? IS IT *REALLY* SO IMPORTANT?

I'M AFRAID *SO*, MARGARET. I'VE *STILL* GOT TO EARN A *LIVING!* NO ONE WANTS TO KNOW ABOUT A MAN'S *PERSONAL SORROW!* PEOPLE ARE *LIKE* THAT...

SO LONG, PAUL. BE A *GOOD BOY* AND I'LL *BRING* YOU SOMETHING FROM *NEW YORK!* SOMETHING *NICE!*

TAKE *CARE* OF YOURSELF, RALPH. AND... RALPH, *DON'T* BE *BITTER! PROMISE?*

"SO YOUR FATHER WENT TO THAT HARDWARE MANUFACTURER'S CONVENTION. BUT HE DIDN'T BRING HOME SOMETHING NICE. REMEMBER? HE BROUGHT HOME COLDNESS... ANGER... AND PAIN!"

RALPH! I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU BACK SO *SOON!*

I MADE UP MY MIND ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT! I... GOT... *FED UP* WITH *HARDWARE*... AND *CROWDS*...

RALPH! AREN'T YOU EVEN GOING TO *KISS ME "HELLO"?*

I'M GOING TO MY *ROOM! I'M TIRED!*

DAD...!

"THAT WAS WHEN THINGS REALLY BEGAN TO CHANGE, WASN'T IT? YOUR MOTHER TOLD ME, AFTERWARD, HOW YOU RAN TO YOUR FATHER EAGERLY... AND HOW HE GREETED YOU..."

DAD, YOU'RE *BACK...*

GET OUT OF MY WAY! I SAID I'M TIRED!

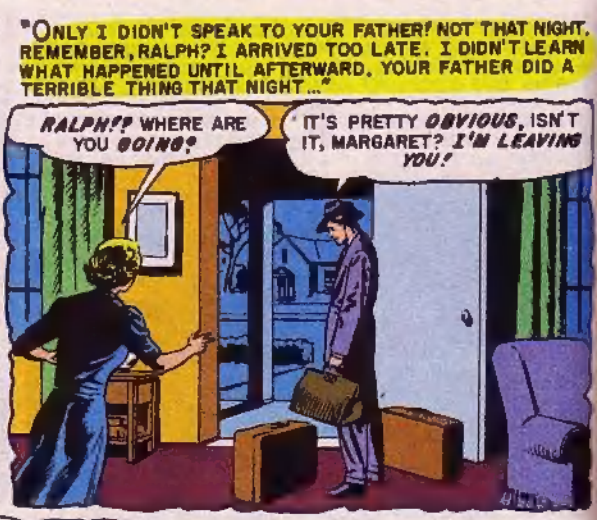
RALPH! RALPH, *PLEASE!* WHAT'S *WRONG?* *RALPH?*

MOM, HE... HE PUSHED ME *AWAY.* HE... HE ACTS LIKE HE DOESN'T *WANT* ME! *WHY,* MOM? *WHY?*

"HOW MANY TIMES YOU ASKED YOUR MOTHER THAT QUESTION, PAUL! HER HEART ACHED SO FOR YOU. YOU NEVER KNEW THAT SHE CAME TO ME A FEW DAYS LATER, DID YOU?"

PASTOR, IT... SOB... IT'S LIKE A *NIGHTMARE!* RALPH ISN'T *RALPH* ANYMORE! HE ACTS AS THOUGH HE *HATES* US... AS THOUGH HE HATES *EVERYONE!*

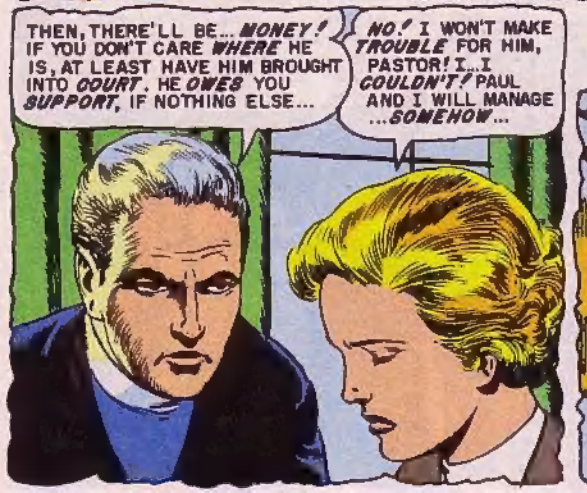
HE STAYS IN HIS ROOM! HE WON'T LET US HAVE VISITORS! PASTOR, WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM? WHY DOES HE HATE THE WHOLE WORLD?
THERE'S ONLY ONE EXPLANATION, MRS. COOPER! SOMEHOW, THE DEATH OF YOUR SON HAS WARPED HIM. BUT YOUR HUSBAND IS A GOOD MAN. SUPPOSE I TALK TO HIM? I'LL STOP BY THIS EVENING...

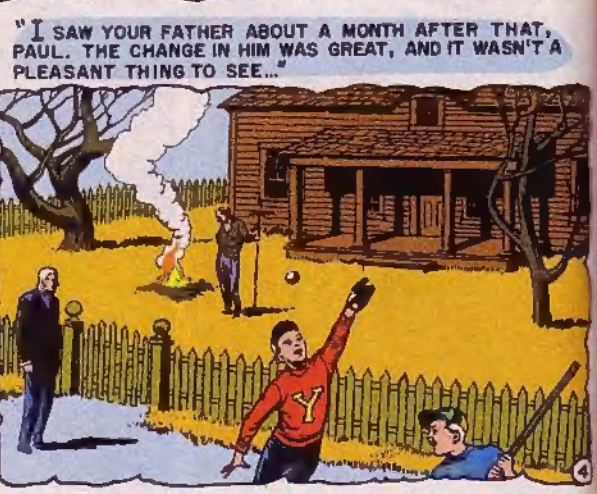

"ONLY I DIDN'T SPEAK TO YOUR FATHER! NOT THAT NIGHT. REMEMBER, RALPH? I ARRIVED TOO LATE. I DIDN'T LEARN WHAT HAPPENED UNTIL AFTERWARD. YOUR FATHER DID A TERRIBLE THING THAT NIGHT..."
RALPH!? WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS, ISN'T IT, MARGARET? I'M LEAVING YOU!

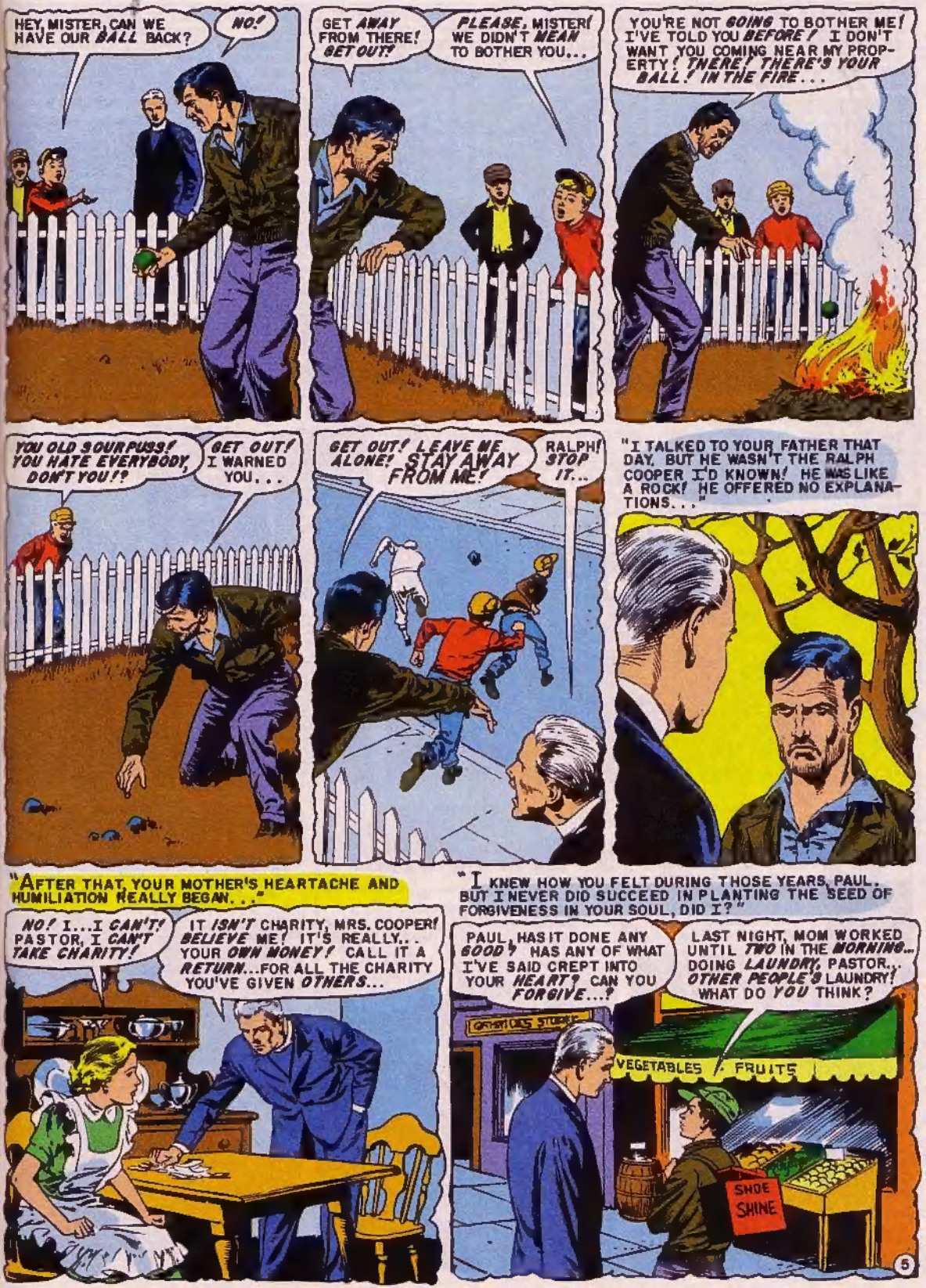
YOU'RE...LEAVING!? RALPH, NO! YOU'RE... JOKING! WHY!? AT LEAST TELL ME WHY!
I'LL DO WITHOUT THE LAST FOND EMBRACE! AS TO WHY... I'M JUST SICK OF THE TREADMILL, THAT'S ALL! I'M SICK OF WORK ...OF ROUTINE... OF PEOPLE!

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE WHY I'M LEAVING?! THIS WAY IS BEST FOR ALL OF US! DO YOURSELF A FAVOR, MARGARET! FORGET ME... THE WAY I'M GOING TO FORGET YOU!

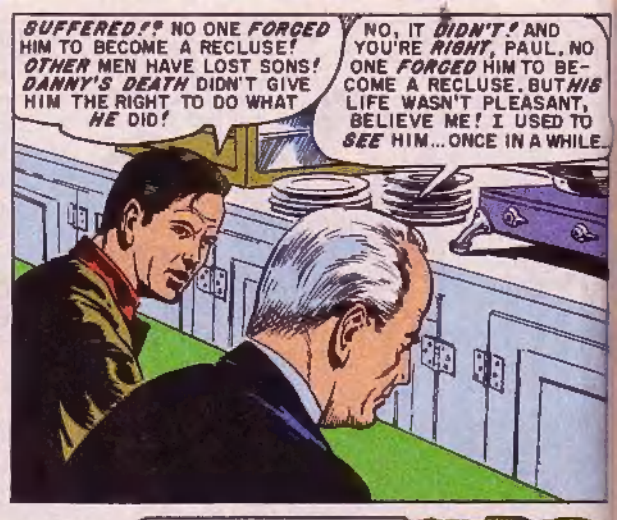
"IF YOU BEGAN TO HATE YOUR FATHER AFTER THAT...WELL, I CAN UNDERSTAND, PAUL. BUT YOUR MOTHER NEVER STOPPED LOVING HIM. NOT EVEN THEN. I KNOW. I TRIED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE SITUATION..."
MRS. COOPER, DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? I KNOW WHERE YOUR HUSBAND IS! I ASKED THE POLICE TO LOCATE HIM. HE'S BOUGHT THAT OLD HOUSE ON ELM STREET...
I KNOW! RALPH'S ATTORNEY TOLD ME! RALPH HAS SOLD OUT HIS BUSINESS, TOO!


THEN, THERE'LL BE... MONEY! IF YOU DON'T CARE WHERE HE IS, AT LEAST HAVE HIM BROUGHT INTO COURT. HE OWES YOU SUPPORT, IF NOTHING ELSE...
NO! I WON'T MAKE TROUBLE FOR HIM, PASTOR! I...I COULDN'T! PAUL AND I WILL MANAGE ...SOMEHOW...


"I SAW YOUR FATHER ABOUT A MONTH AFTER THAT, PAUL. THE CHANGE IN HIM WAS GREAT, AND IT WASN'T A PLEASANT THING TO SEE..."


HEY, MISTER, CAN WE HAVE OUR BALL BACK?
NO!
GET AWAY FROM THERE! GET OUT!
PLEASE, MISTER! WE DIDN'T MEAN TO BOTHER YOU...
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BOTHER ME! I'VE TOLD YOU BEFORE! I DON'T WANT YOU COMING NEAR MY PROPERTY! THERE! THERE'S YOUR BALL! IN THE FIRE...
YOU OLD SOURPUSS! YOU HATE EVERYBODY, DON'T YOU!?
GET OUT! I WARNED YOU...
GET OUT! LEAVE ME ALONE! STAY AWAY FROM ME!
RALPH! STOP IT...
"I TALKED TO YOUR FATHER THAT DAY. BUT HE WASN'T THE RALPH COOPER I'D KNOWN! HE WAS LIKE A ROCK! HE OFFERED NO EXPLANATIONS..."
"AFTER THAT, YOUR MOTHER'S HEARTACHE AND HUMILIATION REALLY BEGAN..."
NO! I...I CAN'T! PASTOR, I CAN'T TAKE CHARITY!
IT ISN'T CHARITY, MRS. COOPER! BELIEVE ME! IT'S REALLY... YOUR OWN MONEY! CALL IT A RETURN...FOR ALL THE CHARITY YOU'VE GIVEN OTHERS...
"I KNEW HOW YOU FELT DURING THOSE YEARS, PAUL. BUT I NEVER DID SUCCEED IN PLANTING THE SEED OF FORGIVENESS IN YOUR SOUL, DID I?"
PAUL, HAS IT DONE ANY GOOD? HAS ANY OF WHAT I'VE SAID CREPT INTO YOUR HEART? CAN YOU FORGIVE...?
LAST NIGHT, MOM WORKED UNTIL TWO IN THE MORNING... DOING LAUNDRY, PASTOR... OTHER PEOPLE'S LAUNDRY! WHAT DO YOU THINK?
VEGETABLES
FRUITS
SHOE SHINE

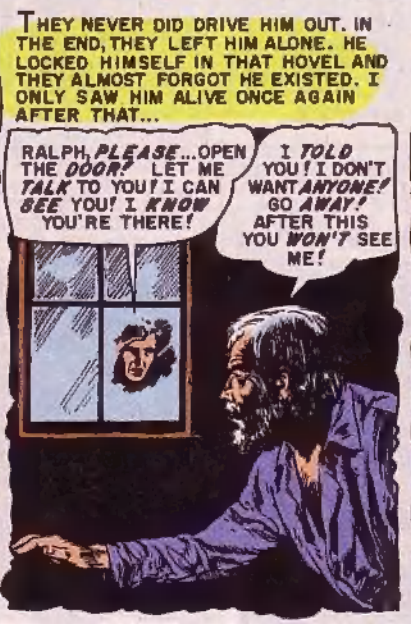
THOSE YEARS WEREN'T PLEASANT, PASTOR EDWARDS! BECAUSE OF HIM, WE HAD TO TAKE CHARITY! WE SUFFERED! HOW COULD I FORGIVE?
BUT DIDN'T YOUR FATHER SUFFER, TOO? IN HIS OWN WAY? YOU'VE SEEN HOW HE LIVED!

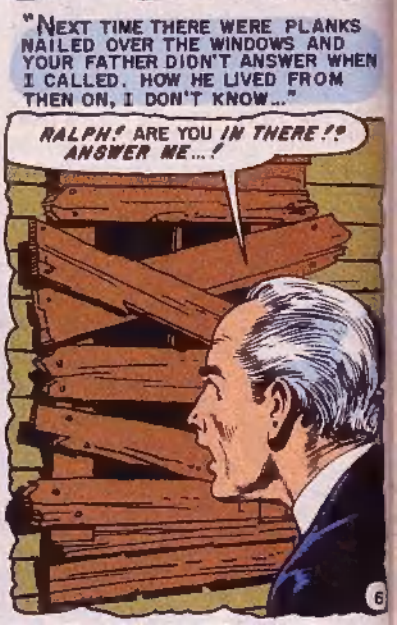

SUFFERED!? NO ONE FORCED HIM TO BECOME A RECLUSE! OTHER MEN HAVE LOST SONS! DANNY'S DEATH DIDN'T GIVE HIM THE RIGHT TO DO WHAT HE DID!
NO, IT DIDN'T! AND YOU'RE RIGHT, PAUL. NO ONE FORCED HIM TO BECOME A RECLUSE. BUT HIS LIFE WASN'T PLEASANT, BELIEVE ME! I USED TO SEE HIM... ONCE IN A WHILE.

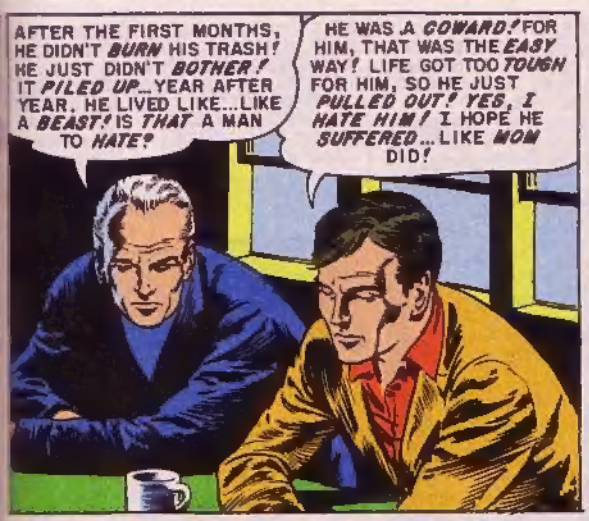
"...AND I'D PLEAD WITH HIM..."
RALPH! FOR YOUR OWN SAKE! GET OUT OF THIS... THIS PLACE! IT... IT'S NOT FIT FOR A HUMAN BEING! HOW LONG CAN YOU GO ON LIKE THIS?
FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE! I DIDN'T ASK YOU TO COME BACK HERE! WHY CAN'T YOU LEAVE ME ALONE? THAT'S ALL I ASK! JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!

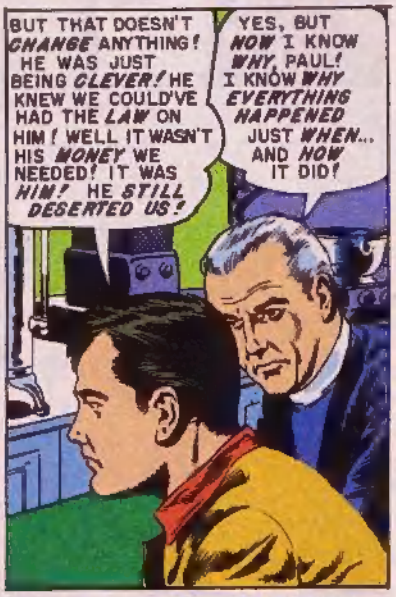
WHAT WAS THAT?

A BRICK! SOMEONE MUST HAVE THROWN IT!
SOMEONE!? IT COULD HAVE BEEN ANYONE ON THE BLOCK! THEY ALL HATE ME! ALL RIGHT, LET 'EM! I DON'T WANT 'EM! I DON'T WANT ANYONE! THEY WANT TO DRIVE ME OUT, BUT THEY WON'T!


THEY NEVER DID DRIVE HIM OUT. IN THE END, THEY LEFT HIM ALONE. HE LOCKED HIMSELF IN THAT HOVEL AND THEY ALMOST FORGOT HE EXISTED. I ONLY SAW HIM ALIVE ONCE AGAIN AFTER THAT...
RALPH, PLEASE... OPEN THE DOOR! LET ME TALK TO YOU! I CAN SEE YOU! I KNOW YOU'RE THERE!
I TOLD YOU! I DON'T WANT ANYONE! GO AWAY! AFTER THIS YOU WON'T SEE ME!

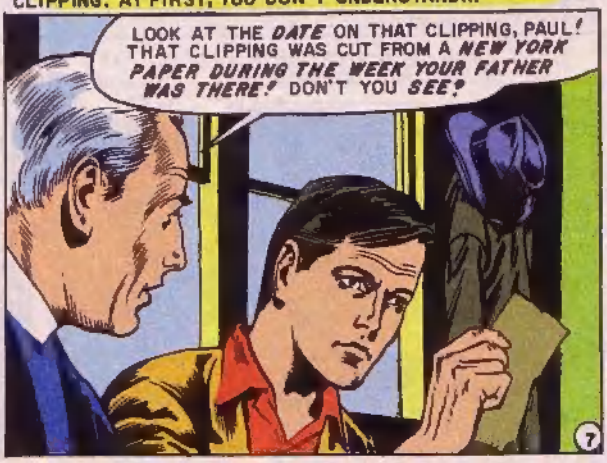

"NEXT TIME THERE WERE PLANKS NAILED OVER THE WINDOWS AND YOUR FATHER DIDN'T ANSWER WHEN I CALLED. HOW HE LIVED FROM THEN ON, I DON'T KNOW..."
RALPH! ARE YOU IN THERE!? ANSWER ME...!





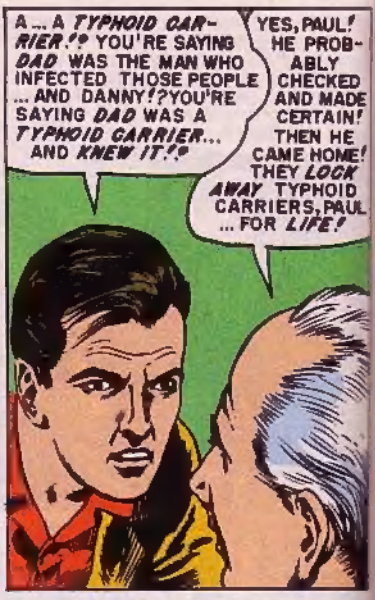
HE HOLDS THEM OUT TO YOU... THE THINGS HE'S FOUND...

YOU TAKE THE THINGS FROM PASTOR EDWARDS' HAND... THE FADED SNAPSHOT AND THE YELLOWED NEWSPAPER CLIPPING. AT FIRST, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND...

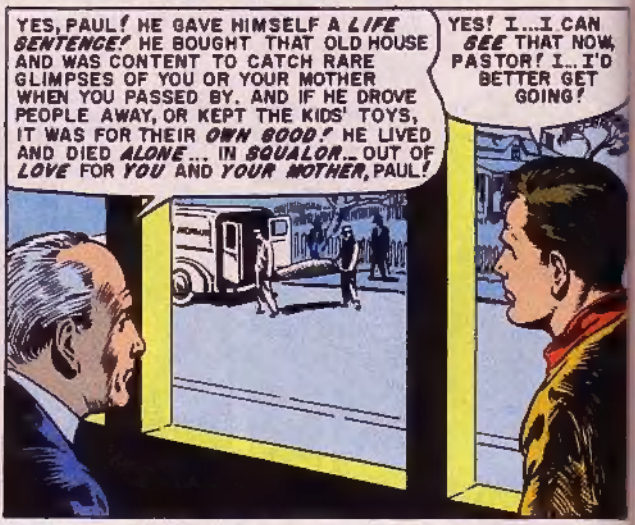


FOR A MOMENT, NO!... YOU DON'T SEE! BUT THEN YOU REMEMBER... SOMETHING YOU READ ONCE... ABOUT PEOPLE LIKE THE PERSON IN THE CLIPPING...

YOU REMEMBER READING ABOUT PEOPLE WHO CAN BE EXPOSED TO A DISEASE, PICK UP THE GERM, AND INFECT OTHER PEOPLE... ALL WITHOUT THEMSELVES BEING INFECTED...



SUDDENLY, IT'S ALL SO EASY TO UNDERSTAND...



THEY'RE STILL ACROSS THE STREET WHEN YOU COME OUT... THE PEOPLE ... THE BITTER, HATING, PEOPLE. THEY'LL NEVER KNOW! THEY'LL HATE FOR A LITTLE WHILE LONGER, AND THEN THEY'LL FORGET. BUT YOU WON'T FORGET! NOT EVER...

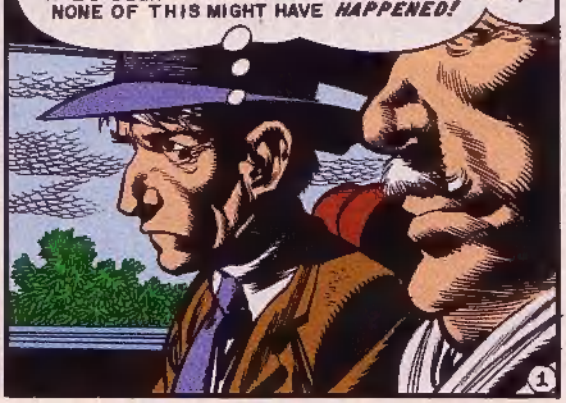
AND YOU LIFT YOUR HEAD PROUDLY...

THE DEBT

EIGHT YEARS BEFORE, IT HAD SEEMED LIKE A BAD DREAM TO JOE WILER. THEY'D CLOSED THE PONDEROUS PRISON GATES BEHIND HIM... LOCKED HIM OFF FROM FAMILIAR SIGHTS AND SOUNDS AND FRIENDS... AND LOCKED HIM INSIDE A STRANGE NEW WORLD OF BARS AND GREY CONCRETE WALLS AND UNFRIENDLY FACES. THEN JOE DID HIS TEN YEAR SENTENCE IN EIGHT, AND COMING OUT SEEMED LIKE A BAD DREAM TOO, FOR HIS ONCE FAMILIAR WORLD HAD CHANGED. ONLY GEORGE RYDER HADN'T CHANGED...

THE TWO MEN GOT INTO GEORGE RYDER'S CADILLAC AND DROVE SLOWLY OUT OF THE SHADOWS OF THE GRIM PENITENTIARY WALLS...

JOE WILER STARED SILENTLY AHEAD THROUGH THE CRYSTAL CLEAR WINDSHIELD. HE SAW NOT THE BEAUTY OF THE OPEN WORLD BEFORE HIM, BUT RATHER THE LONG AGO PAST... THOSE WILD DAYS OF HIS SON... TED...



THE MEMORIES OF THOSE DAYS BROUGHT VIVID PICTURES TO JOE WILER'S MIND. AND YET, IT SEEMED A PART OF ANOTHER MAN'S LIFE, NOT HIS OWN! JOE REMEMBERED ONE NIGHT...

IS *THIS* THE TIME FOR A FIFTEEN YEAR OLD BOY TO BE COMING *HOME?* TWO O'CLOCK IN THE *MORNING?*

WHAT *DIFFERENCE* DOES IT MAKE? IT'S *SUMMER!* I DON'T HAVE TO GET UP TO GO TO *SCHOOL!* SO GET OFF MY *BACK*, PA! I DON'T NEED A *NURSEMAID!*

JOE REMEMBERED HOW HE COULD NEVER EVEN GET MAD AT HIS SON... NOT REALLY. HE COULD ONLY *ACT* MAD...

DON'T TALK TO *ME* THAT WAY, TED! YOU THINK I DON'T *KNOW* WHERE YOU'VE BEEN AND WHAT YOU'VE BEEN UP TO?! THOSE *HOODLUMS*... YOUR *PALS*... *STEALING A CAR...!*

STEALING!? WE... WE JUST TOOK A *RIDE!*

...AND THE *POLICE* PICKED UP THE *LOT* OF YOU... AND YOU GOT *ANOTHER* RIDE... TO *JAIL!* HOW DID IT *FEEL* BEING IN A CELL... LIKE A *CRIMINAL?!*

IT WAS ONLY FOR AN *HOUR!* THEN THE GUY WHO *OWNED* THE CAR CAME DOWN! BUT HE *DIDN'T* BRING ANY *CHARGES!*

SO CAPTAIN HIGGINS *TOLD* ME WHEN HE *PHONED*, TED! YOU WERE *LUCKY* THIS TIME! BUT *NEXT* TIME... WELL, THERE'D BETTER NOT *BE* A NEXT TIME!

LAY OFF, PA. WILL YOU! I'M TIRED!

BUT THERE'D *BEEN* A NEXT TIME... AND *MANY* TIMES AFTER THAT DURING THE YEARS THAT FOLLOWED. BUT ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, USUALLY WITH JOE'S HELP, TED HAD TIME AND AGAIN SQUEEZED *OUT* OF SERIOUS TROUBLE...

YOU *KNOW* I DON'T MIND GIVING YOU *TIME OFF*, JOE... BUT YOU'D BE *BETTER OFF* LETTING THAT BOY OF YOURS *TAKE* HIS MEDICINE FOR ONCE!

TED'S *YOUNG*, MR. RYDER! HE'S *ONLY* TWENTY-TWO! *HE'LL* STRAIGHTEN HIMSELF OUT! HE *PROMISED*...

PROMISED!? GOOD LORD, MAN... TED ISN'T A *KID* ANY LONGER! HE OUGHT TO BE WORKING... PAYING HIS OWN WAY! HE'S *SPOILED ROTTEN*, JOE!

IT HASN'T BEEN *EASY* FOR HIM... GROWING UP WITHOUT A *MOTHER!* HE'S BEEN ON HIS *OWN* TOO MUCH!

SO JOE WILER HAD MADE EXCUSES FOR TED. BUT THE TIME CAME WHEN EXCUSES WERE NOT ENOUGH...

I *KNOW* BUD MICHAELS IS EVERYTHING YOU *SAY* HE IS, MR. WILER... A *THIEF*, PERHAPS... A CHEAP *HOODLUM*... BUT HE *STILL* GETS THE PROTECTION OF THE *LAW!*

BUT, CAPTAIN HIGGINS! TED AND HIS GIRL... LOIS... THEY WERE JUST TAKING A *WALK*... NOT *HARMING* ANYONE! WHAT ABOUT PROTECTING *THEM!* IF MICHAELS HADN'T PASSED THAT *REMARK* ABOUT LOIS, TED WOULDN'T HAVE *HIT* HIM!

UNFORTUNATELY FOR TED, THERE AREN'T ANY *WITNESSES* THAT MICHAELS SAID ANYTHING WRONG! THE *GIRL'S* WORD ISN'T *ENOUGH!* I'M AFRAID YOU'RE *IN FOR IT* THIS TIME, TED!

PLEASE, CAPTAIN! IF *EVER* I NEEDED A BREAK, I NEED ONE *NOW!* LOIS AND I ARE GOING TO BE *MARRIED!*

MARRIED!? ON *WHAT*, TED?! YOU HAVEN'T EVEN GOT A *JOB!* IT'S *HARD ENOUGH* FOR ME TO SUPPORT *YOU ALONE*...

I'LL *GET* A JOB *FIRST*, DAD! I'VE BEEN *LOOKING!* NOBODY WANTS TO *GIVE* ME A BREAK! I'VE GOT A *BAD REPUTATION!* OKAY, THAT'S *MY* FAULT, BUT I'VE *GOT* TO HAVE A *CHANCE!*

YOU HEAR *THAT*, CAPTAIN? HE WANTS TO STRAIGHTEN HIMSELF OUT... GET A *JOB*... GET *MARRIED!*

JOE, I'VE *HEARD* TED'S GLIB TALK *BEFORE!* I THINK *THIS* IS MORE OF THE *SAME!* BUT... WELL... FOR *YOUR* SAKE... *BUT NEXT TIME, I THROW THE BOOK AT HIM!*

THAT SAME DAY, JOE HAD TAKEN TED TO THE BANK... TO GEORGE RYDER'S OFFICE.

JOE, I'[illegible] *ANYTHING* YOU! *ANYTHING*... *BUT THIS!*

GEORGE, LISTEN. YOU *SAID* TED OUGHT TO BE WORKING! *ALL RIGHT* THEN! *LET HIM WORK!*

HE WANTS TO *SETTLE DOWN!* I KNOW HE *MEANS* IT THIS TIME, GEORGE! GIVE HIM A *CHANCE!* *PLEASE*...

IT'S NOT *MY* MONEY IN THIS BANK, JOE! IT'S THE *DEPOSITORS'!* *I'M RESPONSIBLE!* *NO!* I... I *CAN'T* DO IT! I'D BE *CRAZY!*

MR. RYDER, I'VE *GIVEN UP* ALL MY OLD FRIENDS! *LOIS* MADE ME DO IT! IF YOU GIVE ME A *BREAK*, SIR, I *COULDN'T* LET *HER* DOWN... OR MY *FATHER*...

VERY WELL, TED! BUT *GET THIS STRAIGHT!* YOUR FATHER HAS WORKED IN THIS BANK FOR *YEARS!* ONE BAD ACT BY *YOU*, AND *HE'LL* BE *THROUGH* HERE... *UNDERSTAND? THROUGH!*

SO TED STARTED HIS JOB AT THE BANK THE NEXT DAY. . . AND A WEEK LATER, HE AND LOIS WERE MARRIED.

THE *HONEYMOON* CAN *WAIT*, DAD! WE'RE GOING TO BUY A LITTLE *HOUSE*, AND. . .

HOUSE!? THAT'S GOING TO BE A BIT *STEEP*, TED! YOU *CAN'T* EXPECT TO MAKE THE *DOWN-PAYMENT* WITH YOUR *WEEK'S SALARY* FROM THE *BANK*. . .

I'M STILL WORKING, MR. WILER! AND I HAVE THE MONEY *SAVED!* WE'LL BE ABLE TO MAKE A *SUBSTANTIAL DOWN-PAYMENT!*

YOU'RE *QUITE SOME GIRL*, LOIS! YOU'LL BE *GOOD* FOR TED! I CAN *SEE* THAT. . .

AND JOE REMEMBERED THAT, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY YEARS, HE'D BEEN AT PEACE WITH THE WORLD. . .

YOUR BOY'S WIFE DRIVING HIM TO WORK IN A *NICE CAR*. . . THEY OWN THEIR OWN *HOME*. . . AND I SAW THEM OUT AT THE *COUNTRY CLUB DANCE* SATURDAY. . .

WELL, IT'S A *USED* CAR, GEORGE, AND IT'LL BE MANY *YEARS* BEFORE THEY ACTUALLY *OWN* THEIR HOME! *I* USED TO *WORRY* ABOUT THE WAY THEY SPEND, BUT I GUESS. . . TED AND LOIS ARE *PRETTY LEVEL-HEADED!*

GEORGE RYDER HAD BEEN THE ONE SOUR NOTE IN JOE WILER'S LIFE AFTER TED'S MARRIAGE. . .

I NOTICE THE WAY YOU *LOOK* AT TED ALL THE TIME, GEORGE. . . *WORRIED-LIKE!* REST ASSURED THAT ANY MONEY THOSE KIDS *HAVE*, THEY'VE COME BY *HONESTLY!* TED'S *ALL RIGHT*, NOW. . .

IS HE? WE'LL *SEE*, JOE! WE'LL *SEE*. . .

AND THEN, SEVERAL MONTHS LATER, IT'D HAPPENED. . .

YOU WANTED TO *SEE* ME?

COME IN, JOE. . . AND CLOSE THE DOOR! GENTLEMEN, THIS IS MR. WILER. . . WHOSE *SON* I'VE BEEN *TELLING* YOU ABOUT!

JOE! THESE MEN ARE *STATE BANK EXAMINERS*. TED'S ACCOUNTS ARE *FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS SHORT!*

AND. . . AND YOU THINK THAT TED. . .? OH, BUT YOU MUST BE *MISTAKEN!*

I'M *SORRY*, JOE! I WISH THERE *WERE* SOME MISTAKE! BUT THESE MEN KNOW THEIR *JOBS!* WHERE ARE TED AND HIS WIFE *VACATIONING*, JOE?

I. . . I'VE GOT TO HAVE TIME TO *THINK!* ONLY. . . ONLY A *MINUTE*, GEORGE! *PLEASE!*

AND JOE REMEMBERED HOW HE'D STARED OUT THE WINDOW OF GEORGE RYDER'S OFFICE, LOOKING OUT AT THE QUIET, PRETTY STREETS OF HIS TOWN...

IF IT WAS UP TO *ME*, I'D WORK SOMETHING *OUT* WITH YOU, JOE! BUT IT'S NOT *MY* MONEY! IT'S THE *DEPOSITORS'!* FOR *ONCE* IN HIS LIFE, TED'S GOT TO TAKE HIS *MEDICINE*...

NO! *NOT TED*...

JOE'D *KNOWN* THEN. HE'D KNOWN THAT TED *WAS* BAD... OR MAYBE JUST *WEAK!* BUT HE'D STILL *LOVED* TED, AND SO, HE'D TURNED HIS BACK ON THE STREETS AND THE TOWN HE LOVED...

TED DIDN'T *TAKE* THE MONEY! *I TOOK IT!* YES, I *GAMBLED!* I LOST A LITTLE ON THE *HORSES* AND I TOOK A LITTLE *MORE* HOPING TO *WIN BACK*, BUT I LOST *THAT!* SO I *KEPT TAKING* AND...

JOE! NO! DON'T *SAY* IT! *YOU*...

IT'S *TRUE*, GEORGE! I... I DIDN'T GAMBLE IT *ALL* AWAY! I *STILL* HAVE TWENTY-SEVEN HUNDRED DOLLARS IN MY *VAULT* DOWNSTAIRS! I CAN MAKE RESTITUTION TO *THAT* EXTENT!

JOE! JOE... I... I NEVER *THOUGHT YOU'D*...

JOE'D RETURNED MORE THAN HALF THE MISSING MONEY... TWENTY-SEVEN HUNDRED DOLLARS OF MONEY HE'D *EARNED*... HIS *LIFE'S SAVINGS!* HE'D BEEN ARRESTED AND BROUGHT TO TRIAL. HE'D PLEADED GUILTY...

I HAVE *TAKEN* MR. RYDER'S PLEA ON YOUR BEHALF INTO *CONSIDERATION!* THEREFORE, I SENTENCE YOU, JOSEPH WILER, TO *TEN YEARS* IN THE STATE PENITENTIARY...

TEN... YEARS!

JOE REMEMBERED HOW HE'D SWAYED... HOW HIS FRIEND GEORGE HAD GRABBED HIM... HOW HE'D SEEN THE TEARS IN GEORGE'S EYES...

I'LL... I'LL DO EVERYTHING I *CAN* TO... TO HAVE THIS TERRIBLE SENTENCE *CHANGED!* I'LL KEEP MY LAWYERS *WORKING* FOR YOU, JOE!

TEN YEARS!? I... I NEVER *THOUGHT* OF MYSELF AS *OLD* BEFORE! *TEN YEARS* WILL BE TAKEN OUT OF MY LIFE! I'LL BE... AN *OLD MAN*.

SO JOE WILER HAD DONE THE ULTIMATE FOR HIS SON, HE'D SACRIFICED HIMSELF ON THE ALTER OF PATERNAL DEVOTION. HE'D FELT VERY NOBLE...

DAD, WHY DIDN'T YOU *CALL?* WHY DIDN'T YOU *WRITE?* I DIDN'T *FIND OUT* TILL WE GOT BACK TODAY!

IT'S *BETTER THIS* WAY, SON! YOUR NAME HAS BEEN *KEPT CLEAN!* MR. RYDER ISN'T HOLDING THIS *AGAINST YOU!* NOW, *KEEP YOUR NAME CLEAN!*

DAD, I JUST CAN'T BELIEVE THAT YOU *DID* IT! *TEN YEARS*...

MY LIFE IS *FINISHED*, TED! *YOURS* AND *LOIS'S* ARE JUST *BEGINNING!* YOU CAN *MAKE GOOD* IF YOU DO THE *RIGHT THINGS!* I CAN'T *HELP* YOU ANYMORE! GO NOW... AND *GOD BLESS YOU!*

AND SO, NOW, WITH TWO YEARS OFF FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR, JOE WILER WAS ON HIS WAY HOME. BUT HE NO LONGER *FELT* NOBLE... ONLY *TIRED*... AND *VERY OLD*...

I'LL NEVER FORGET YOUR MANY *KINDNESSES* WHILE I WAS UP THERE, GEORGE... YOUR CONSTANT EFFORTS TO GET ME *OUT*... THE *FOOD BASKETS*... ALL THE TIMES YOU *VISITED* ME!

IT... IT WAS THE *LEAST* I COULD DO, JOE! AND JUST REMEMBER THAT THERE'S A *JOB* WAITING WHENEVER YOU WANT TO *START!*

THERE WAS A JOYOUS AND TEARFUL REUNION AT THE WILER HOME LATER THAT DAY...

THIS IS JOSEPH, DAD. HE'S *SEVEN!* WE *NAMED* HIM AFTER *YOU!* AND THIS IS *TED JUNIOR!* HE'S *FIVE*...

IT'S GOOD TO HAVE YOU *HOME*, MR. WILER! YOU'LL *STAY* WITH US! WE BOTH *WANT* YOU TO...

IT WAS GRATIFYING... IN A WAY. TED AND LOIS WERE SHOWING THEIR APPRECIATION FOR JOE'S SACRIFICE. AND GEORGE RYDER WAS AFFORDING HIM THE DIGNITY OF A JOB. WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD IT WAS AFTER ALL! BUT THAT NIGHT...

DR. WILLACE! DAD AND I RUSHED OVER AS SOON AS WE GOT YOUR *MESSAGE!* WHAT'S *WRONG?*

IT'S *MR. RYDER!* HE'S HAD A *HEART ATTACK!* IT'S JUST A MATTER OF *MINUTES!* HE'S *DYING*, AND HE *KNOWS* IT! HE INSISTED UPON *SEEING YOU BOTH*...

JOE WILER COULD HARDLY HOLD BACK THE TEARS AS HE TOOK THE HAND OF HIS DYING FRIEND...

GEORGE, YOU... *CHOKE*... YOU'LL BE *ALL RIGHT!* WHY, THE BANK... IT JUST WOULDN'T BE THE *SAME*...

YOU'VE... GOT... TO... *HEAR*... ME, JOE! THAT... THAT *MONEY!* THAT... FIVE THOUSAND... DOLLARS! I... I WAS ON A *SPOT*... DEEP *DEBT*... PLAYING THE *MARKET*... *LOSING* STEADILY! I... *GASP*... *I STOLE THAT MONEY, JOE!*

IT TOOK SOME TIME FOR GEORGE RYDER'S WORDS TO SINK IN. TED WAS THE FIRST TO UNDERSTAND...

YOU STOLE THAT MONEY!? BUT WHY DID *MY* FATHER CONFESS? WHY DID HE GO TO PRISON IN *YOUR PLACE?*

I... TRIED... *EVERYTHING*... TO SAVE HIM... EVERYTHING BUT *CONFESSING MYSELF!* I... COULDN'T... FACE THE *DISGRACE*.

JOE WILER TURNED SLOWLY TO HIS SON...

TED! YOU... YOU *DIDN'T* STEAL THAT MONEY!? I THOUGHT... THEN ALL MY *SACRIFICING*... *CHOKE*... IT WAS FOR *NOTHING!*

I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE MONEY, DAD! LOIS WAS *WORKING!* WE WERE DOING *ALL RIGHT!* I... THOUGHT... YOU...

THEN JOE WILER GRABBED GEORGE RYDER BY THE SHOULDERS WITH THE GRIP OF A MADMAN AND SHOOK HIM VIOLENTLY. AND EVEN TED COULD NOT TEAR HIM AWAY...

YOU *CHEAT!* THAT'S WHY YOU WERE SO *GOOD* TO ME... TRYING TO *BUY* THE EIGHT YEARS OF MY LIFE YOU *STOLE!* YOU *CHEAT! CHEAT! CHEAT!*

DAD! *DAD!* THAT'S *NO GOOD* NOW! HE'S *DEAD! DAD*...

THE END

TOTALLY BLIND

EVERY MORNING WAS THE BEGINNING OF A PAINFUL ORDEAL FOR MILDRED WILSON. IT WASN'T THE CRUEL ALARM, JANGLING HER FROM HER LONELY FITFUL SLEEP. IT WASN'T THE TARNISHED, COLD-WATER FLAT WITH ITS SOILED WALL PAPER AND ITS MUSTY SMELL AND ITS COLD, HOLLOW, EMPTY ECHOES. THESE THINGS MILLIE COULD GRIN AT WRYLY. SHE COULD ACCEPT THE POVERTY AND DRABNESS AND WRETCHEDNESS OF HER LIFE. THE PAINFUL THING...THE ORDEAL SHE HATED FOR THE TRUE MISERY IT BROUGHT...WAS WHEN SHE CLIMBED FROM HER LUMPY BED AND STOOD OVER THE RUST-STAINED SINK AND HAD TO GAZE INTO THE MEDICINE CABINET MIRROR. SHE DREADED THE FAMILIAR CHANT THAT ALWAYS DANCED MOCKINGLY THROUGH HER MIND...

MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL... WHO'S THE *UGLIEST*...SOBB... OF THEM ALL?

AND THE ORDEAL WOULD CONTINUE AS MILLIE WALKED TO WORK, PAST MEN...YOUNG AND OLD... WHO, AFTER JUST ONE LOOK, WOULD JERK AWAY AS THEY HAD BEEN SLAPPED THE FACE...

I...I *KNOW* WHAT THEY'RE THINKING THAT MY FACE WOULD STOP A *CLOCK!*

SOMETIMES, MILLIE WOULD HEAR A LOW, UNABASHED, WOLF WHISTLE BEHIND HER, COMMENTING ON HER TRIM FIGURE. THIS WAS THE WORST ORDEAL OF ALL...WHEN THE EAGER YOUNG MAN WOULD CATCH UP AND...

HI, HONEY! MIND IF ...I...GULP! *MY MISTAKE!* I...I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY *SISTER!*

MILLIE WAS POPULAR, HOWEVER, AT THE OFFICE... WITH THE *GIRLS!* AT *LUNCHTIME,* SHE WOULD *ALWAYS* HAVE *COMPANY*...

HELLO, ETHEL!

HI, JOE!

MY *UGLINESS* MAKES *HER* STAND OUT LIKE A *RAVING BEAUTY! THAT'S* WHY SHE LIKES TO EAT WITH *ME!* THAT'S WHY THEY *ALL* DO!

SCURRYING HOME AT NIGHT, THANKFUL FOR THE CONCEALING DARKNESS, MILLIE WOULD TRY TO AVOID SEEING THE COUPLES, ARM IN ARM, WALKING IN THE PARK OR SITTING ON BENCHES OR LOLLING ON THE COOL GRASS. BUT HOW COULD SHE *HELP* IT? THEY WERE *EVERYWHERE*...

WHAT IS IT *LIKE*... A MAN LOOKING INTO YOUR EYES... *ADORING* YOU... *WANTING* YOU... *NEEDING* YOU? *WHAT IS IT L-LIKE?*

AND EACH EVENING, IN HER LONELY ROOM, EMPTY OF THE ECHOES OF MANLY TONES... OF A DEEP VOICE... MILLIE WOULD LIE ON HER BED AND CRY...

LIFE... SOB... LIFE ISN'T WORTH *LIVING*... NOT WITH *MY CURSE!* I *WISH*... SOB... I WISH I WERE *DEAD!*

ONE NIGHT, AS MILLIE SAT ALONE, DREAMING OF LOVE AND A WARM TOUCH, SHE WAS STARTLED BY THE RATTLING OF HER DOORKNOB...

WHO... WHO CAN *THAT* BE? *NO ONE* EVER COMES TO SEE *ME.* IT... IT *MUST* BE *MRS. GRIMES*... THE *LANDLADY*...

MILLIE FLUNG OPEN THE DOOR, AND STARED AT THE YOUNG HANDSOME MAN STANDING BEFORE HER... SMILING.

OH, I *BEG* YOUR PARDON! I THOUGHT THIS WAS *MY* ROOM! MY NAME'S *JIM SHIPLEY.* I JUST MOVED *IN* TODAY. *YOU* MUST BE ONE OF MY *NEIGHBORS*...

WHY... WHY *YES!* I'M *MILLIE*... MILLIE *WILSON*...

MILLIE COULDN'T *BELIEVE* IT! *THIS* NICE YOUNG MAN'S SMILE DIDN'T *FADE OUT* WITH INVOLUNTARY SHOCK AT THE BLASPHEMY OF HER FACE. HE DIDN'T SEEM IN ANY HURRY TO *ESCAPE* AT ALL!...

HOW DO YOU *DO,* MISS WILSON? YOUR VOICE IS SO *SOFT* AND *SWEET*... SO *PLEASING!* SO *MANY* PEOPLE HAVE SUCH *SHRILL, HARSH, EXCITED VOICES* THESE DAYS. MAY I SHAKE HANDS? I *KNOW* I'M GOING TO BE *GLAD* WE'RE NEIGHBORS!

G-GLAD?! BUT... I... I...

MILLIE WAS STUNNED AS HE TOOK HER HAND GENTLY. HE DID NOT LET GO, BUT HELD IT, LINGERINGLY, FOR A MOMENT.

YOU HAVE SUCH A *SOFT HAND,* MISS WILSON! SOFT HANDS MEAN A *TENDER HEART,* YOU KNOW! HANDS TIP OFF A PERSON'S *CHARACTER,* TOO! I *KNOW* NOW YOU'RE A *LOVELY PERSON*...

L-LOVELY? GOOD HEAVENS, I... CHOKE...

MILLIE COULDN'T BELIEVE HER *EARS!* HE *LOOKED* PERFECTLY SANE... NORMAL! YET HE WASN'T *MOCKING* HER. SHE THRILLED, PERMITTING A WARM GLOW TO STEAL THROUGH HER, AT HIS APPARENT UTTER SINCERITY. THE *FIRST TIME*... THE FIRST TIME IN HER *LIFE* THAT SHE'D EVER HEARD SUCH WORDS FROM A MAN...

I'M *SO* GLAD I *MADE* THIS MISTAKE, MISS WILSON! I WAS *LOOKING* FOR *509*...

THIS IS *507!* YOU'RE JUST DOWN THE *HALL!*

HE TURNED AWAY AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, SHE NOTICED HIS WHITE CANE...

THANK YOU! IT'S A LITTLE *CONFUSING* THE FIRST DAY. I WON'T HAVE ANY *TROUBLE* ONCE I LEARN THE *EXACT DISTANCES!* GOOD NIGHT, AND I *HOPE* WE'LL BECOME *GOOD FRIENDS,* MISS WILSON...

I... I... CHOKE... I'M *SURE* WE WILL!

SHE WATCHED HIM TAP HIS WAY DOWN THE HALL TO HIS ROOM AND IT ALL FELL NEATLY [redacted] PLACE WITH A HEARTBREAKING CRUSHING THUD AS SHE CLOSED THE DOOR...

BLIND! HE'S... SOB... *BLIND!* *THAT'S* WHY HE DIDN'T *JERK BACK IN REVULSION!* HE TOLD ME I HAD A *SWEET VOICE... SOFT HANDS*... AND KEPT *SMILING* ALL THE WHILE... BECAUSE HE *DIDN'T SEE MY FACE!* SOBBB...

MILLIE RAN THEN TO THE MIRROR... THE TEARS STREAMING FROM HER EYES. AND SHE LAUGHED AS SHE CRIED... AN HYSTERICAL KIND OF LAUGHTER...

HEH... I'VE GOT A *FRIEND,* FINALLY... HEH, HEH! A *MAN WITHOUT EYES TO SEE MY UGLY FACE*... HEH, HEH! A *BLIND* MAN COULD *WANT* TO BE MY FRIEND! EH, EH! IT'S... IT'S SO *FUNNY!* SO... EH, EH, EH... *SO FUNNY! SOBBBBB...*

MILLIE MADE UP HER MIND... AND WHEN BLIND JIM SHIPLEY KNOCKED ON HER DOOR THE NEXT EVENING...

PLEASE, MISS WILSON, DON'T THINK I'M *FORCING* MY *ATTENTIONS* ON YOU... BUT WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE A *WALK* WITH ME?

I'VE GOT TO *TELL* HIM! I *CAN'T TAKE ADVANTAGE* OF HIS *BLINDNESS!* I'VE GOT TO TELL HIM THE *TRUTH*... THAT I'M *UGLY*... UGLY AS *SIN!* I... I...

BUT MILLIE *DIDN'T* TELL HIM. SHE *COULDN'T,* NOT AT THAT *MOMENT.* SHE *WANTED* TO TAKE THAT WALK WITH JIM! SHE *WANTED* TO ENJOY THE ILLUSION... JUST A *BIT MORE!*...

I'D LIKE TO *KNOW* YOU BETTER, MILLIE... IF I MAY *CALL* YOU MILLIE... SO I'LL *START* BY TELLING YOU ABOUT *ME!* I'M A WORLD WAR II VET. I WAS HIT AT NORMANDY... BLINDED. I DON'T *MIND* SO MUCH... *NOW!* THERE'S *STILL* BEAUTY FOR ME TO ENJOY... LIKE *YOUR VOICE*... WHICH TELLS ME THAT *YOU* ARE *BEAUTIFUL!*

OH, *JIM*... CHOKE... I *MUST* TELL YOU! I *MUST*...

BUT *AGAIN* MILLIE COULDN'T BRING HERSELF TO SMASH THIS DELICIOUS DREAM. INSTEAD, SHE *CLUNG* TO HIS WARM, UNKNOWING, UNSEEING FRIENDSHIP... ALWAYS *PUTTING OFF* TELLING HIM JUST A *LITTLE LONGER*... UNTIL, ONE DAY...

MILLIE, DEAR... *I'M LONELY*... AND I FEEL *YOU ARE TOO!* WE WOULDN'T *BE* LONELY AS *MAN AND WIFE!* MILLIE... DARLING... *MARRY ME?*

OH, NO! *NO!* I... I *COULDN'T!* I COULDN'T *DO* THAT TO HIM!

MILLIE, WHAT'S *WRONG?* YOU DON'T *ANSWER!* YOU'RE *DRAWING AWAY!* OH, I *SEE!* WELL, I CAN'T *BLAME* YOU, I GUESS. *WHAT* GIRL WANTS TO *SACRIFICE HER BEAUTY* TO *SIGHTLESS EYES* FOR A *LIFETIME?*

NO, JIM! IT *ISN'T* THAT AT *ALL!* IT'S THE *OTHER WAY AROUND!*

AND NOW MILLIE *PAID* FOR HER BRIEF, SHAM HAPPINESS... PAID *DEARLY* IN THE *COIN* OF *AGONY*... EACH WORD WRENCHED OUT LIKE A BIT OF HER SICK, SAD HEART...

FEEL MY *FACE,* JIM... *EVERY UGLY LINE OF IT! NOW* YOU KNOW WHY I *CAN'T* MARRY YOU! IT'S... SOB... IT'S FOR *YOUR SAKE...*

SHE WINCED, WAITING FOR HIS FURY TO LASH FORTH OVER HER TRICK... LEADING HIM ON FOR SO LONG. BUT HE SLIPPED HIS HANDS DOWN UNTIL THEY CUPPED HER CHIN, AND HE SMILED EVEN WARMER...

I DON'T *CARE* WHAT YOUR FACE IS LIKE, MILLIE! IT'S WHAT'S *UNDERNEATH* THAT COUNTS! AND I KNOW *YOU'RE NOT UGLY*... NOT *YOU,* MILLIE! IT'S *GIVEN* TO *BLIND EYES* TO *SEE INNER BEAUTY SUCH AS YOURS*... THE *ONLY* KIND THAT *COUNTS,* MY DARLING!

THEN YOU... YOU'RE *NOT ANGRY...?*

NO, BABY... I'M *NOT ANGRY!* I *LOVE YOU!* AND IF YOU *MUST KNOW,* THAT *BUSYBODY LANDLADY* OF OURS, *MRS. GRIMES,* THOUGHT IT WAS HER *"DUTY"* WHEN I FIRST STARTED *SEEING* YOU, TO *DESCRIBE* YOU TO ME *IN EVERY MALICIOUS DETAIL.* I *LAUGHED* AT HER! *NOW,* WILL YOU SAY *'YES',* YOU FOOLISH NITWIT?

OH, JIM... DARLING... *DARLING...*

MILLIE'S DAYS FLEW, THEN, IN A HAPPY DELIRIUM. SHE NO LONGER FEARED THAT MEDICINE CABINET MIRROR...

BLIND FOR LIFE, HE'LL *ALWAYS* SEE ME AS HE *IMAGINES* ME. HE'LL *NEVER* SUFFER THE SHOCK OF SEEING MY *ACTUAL FACE.* WE'LL BE *HAPPY...* SO *VERY HAPPY...*

MILLIE AND JIM SET THE WEDDING DATE, BUT FATE'S JESTER SET ANOTHER DATE... A MONTH BEFORE...

OH, I *BEG* YOUR PARDON! I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD *COMPANY,*

MILLIE, THIS IS DR. *ALEX SVENSON!* A FRIEND SENT HIM TO ME. TELL HER THE *WONDERFUL NEWS,* DOC.

THERE IS A *GOOD CHANCE* THAT MY *NEW TECHNIQUE* CAN *RESTORE* MR. SHIPLEY'S *EYESIGHT!* AND NOW, I *MUST GO!* PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF YOU WISH TO *ARRANGE* FOR THE OPERATION, MR. SHIPLEY. GOOD NIGHT...

MILLIE WAS SO GLAD THAT JIM COULD NOT SEE HER FACE THEN... THE PANIC THAT MADE HER MURMUR A LIE...

HOW... HOW *WONDERFUL* FOR YOU, JIM!

NOT REALLY, HON. HE'S *FAMOUS*... IN *DEMAND!* WHERE COULD *I* EVER SCRAPE UP *$1000* TO *PAY HIS FEE?* IT'S... HOPELESS...

MILLIE SLEPT ON A TORTURE RACK ALL THAT NIGHT AS THE GRIM DECISION HUNG BEFORE HER...

$1000 WILL GIVE *JIM* HIS *SIGHT BACK*... AND *LOSE HIM* FOR *ME!* *INNER BEAUTY?!* HE WON'T REMEMBER *THAT* AT *ALL* WHEN HE SEES MY *FACE* FOR THE FIRST TIME! LET JIM *SEE*... AND *LOSE HIM*... OR *KEEP HIM BLIND*... AND *HOLD HIM? WHICH?* OH, GOD, HOW CAN I *CHOOSE!*

BY MORNING, MILLIE'S MIRROR REFLECTED HER SUFFERING... AND THE STRANGE INNER PEACE SHE'D FOUND ALONG WITH IT..

I *LOVE* HIM! WHAT *OTHER* ANSWER IS THERE? I'LL *RAISE* THE MONEY *SOMEHOW*...WITHDRAW MY *SAVINGS*... SKIP *LUNCHES*...SAVE *PENNIES*... *SKRIMP* AND *SCRATCH*. I *MUST!* I *LOVE HIM!*

AND SO, ANOTHER KIND OF ORDEAL BEGAN FOR MILLIE . . .

MY EYES...THIS *TYPING* AT *NIGHT!* BUT I'D GO BLIND *MYSELF* TO SAVE *JIM'S* EYES. HOPE HE DOESN'T *HEAR*, THOUGH, THAT I WORK *HALF THROUGH EACH NIGHT!*

MOM'S DIAMOND RING...GIVEN TO ME BEFORE SHE *DIED*. WELL, *I* WON'T NEED IT *NOW*...AND IT OUGHT TO BRING THE *BALANCE* THAT I NEED!

FINALLY, WITH THE $1000 SHE'D SAVED, MILLIE WENT TO SEE DR. SVENSON AND MADE ARRANGEMENTS FOR JIM'S OPERATION. THEN SHE RUSHED HOME TO TELL HIM THE NEWS. . .

WELL, IT'S ALL SET, DARLING! I MADE AN APPOINTMENT FOR...*JIM! LOOK OUT! THE STAIRS! JIM!*

JIM HAD FORGOTTEN HIS CANE. HE TUMBLED HEADLONG DOWN THE ROOMING HOUSE STAIRS, LANDING AT MILLIE'S FEET. SHE CRADLED HIM IN HER ARMS. . .

DARLING...SOB...ARE YOU *ALL RIGHT?* ANY *PAIN*...*BROKEN BONES?*

N-NO! I'M *OKAY!* JUST *BRUISED* A BIT! MY *HEAD* AND...AND...I'M JUST A LITTLE *DIZZY*, THAT'S ALL!

SHE HELPED HIM TO HIS FEET AND GUIDED HIM BACK UP THE STAIRS TO HIS ROOM. HE ACTED STRANGELY, AS IF DAZED AND SHAKEN. . .

I'M *SORRY* I *STARTLED* YOU LIKE THAT, DEAR. I WAS *SO EXCITED!* I...I'D *MADE ARRANGEMENTS* WITH *DR. SVENSON* FOR THE *OPERATION!* I *SAVED THE MONEY!*

OPERATION? HUH? YOU *SAVED* THE *MONEY?* I...I... *TH-THANKS*, DEAR! I *APPRECIATE* IT!

THE NEXT DAY, JIM ACTED EVEN MORE STRANGELY...

DEAR, WHY NOT *GET MARRIED FIRST*... *THEN* THE OPERATION? I DON'T WANT TO *DELAY* OUR HAPPINESS EVEN *ONE DAY!*

NO, JIM! YOU *MUST* HAVE THE OPERATION *FIRST*. IT'S... IT'S *MORE IMPORTANT!*

IT WAS THEIR FIRST QUARREL. HE PERSISTED AND SHE PERSISTED...

BUT WHAT *DIFFERENCE* DOES IT MAKE, MILLIE? *WHY* IS IT *MORE IMPORTANT?*

ALL RIGHT, JIM! I'LL HAVE TO *GIVE IT TO YOU STRAIGHT!* I... I WANT YOU TO *REMEMBER ME* THE WAY YOU *ENVISIONED ME!* SOB!

YOU SEE, WHEN THEY TAKE THE *BANDAGES* OFF, I'LL... I'LL BE... SOB... *GONE*... *OUT OF YOUR LIFE*... *FOREVER!* *I COULDN'T STAND* TO SEE THE *LOATHING* AND *REVULSION* IN YOUR FACE WHEN YOU *FIRST SEE* MY *TRUE UGLINESS!* SOBB... NOW LET ME *GO*... LET ME BE *ALONE*... SOB...

SHE FLED THEN, SEEKING THE SAFETY OF THE CALLOUS CROWDS IN THE MORNING STREET. BUT FEET POUNDED BEHIND HER. AND FINALLY STRONG ARMS SEIZED HER...

YOU *LITTLE FOOL!* NOW *I'LL* GIVE IT TO *YOU* STRAIGHT! I SAW *DR. SVENSON* BEFORE AND *CANCELLED THE OPERATION!* I GOT YOUR *MONEY* BACK!

YOU... YOU MEAN YOU'D *STAY BLIND*... FOR *ME*...?

LISTEN TO ME, MILLIE! I WAS *GOING* TO KEEP IT A *SECRET* TILL OUR *HONEYMOON* SO YOU WOULDN'T THINK I *MARRIED* YOU OUT OF *PITY!* THAT *FALL* YESTERDAY... IT *DID* SOMETHING... *RELIEVED* SOME *PRESSURE* ON THE *OPTIC NERVES*...

JIM! YOU... YOU RAN *AFTER* ME... THROUGH THE *CROWD!* *YOU CAN SEE!*

SHE COVERED HER FACE IN HER HANDS AND HE WAS VERY GENTLE...

YOU CAN SEE MY FACE! *OH, LORD*...

DON'T HIDE IT, MILLIE. I *FIRST* SAW IT *YESTERDAY*, AT THE BOTTOM OF THE *STAIRS*, SHINING WITH *LOVE* AND *TENDERNESS* AND *UNSELFISHNESS*...

AND HE TOOK HER HANDS AWAY, AND KISSED HER TEAR-STAINED CHEEK...

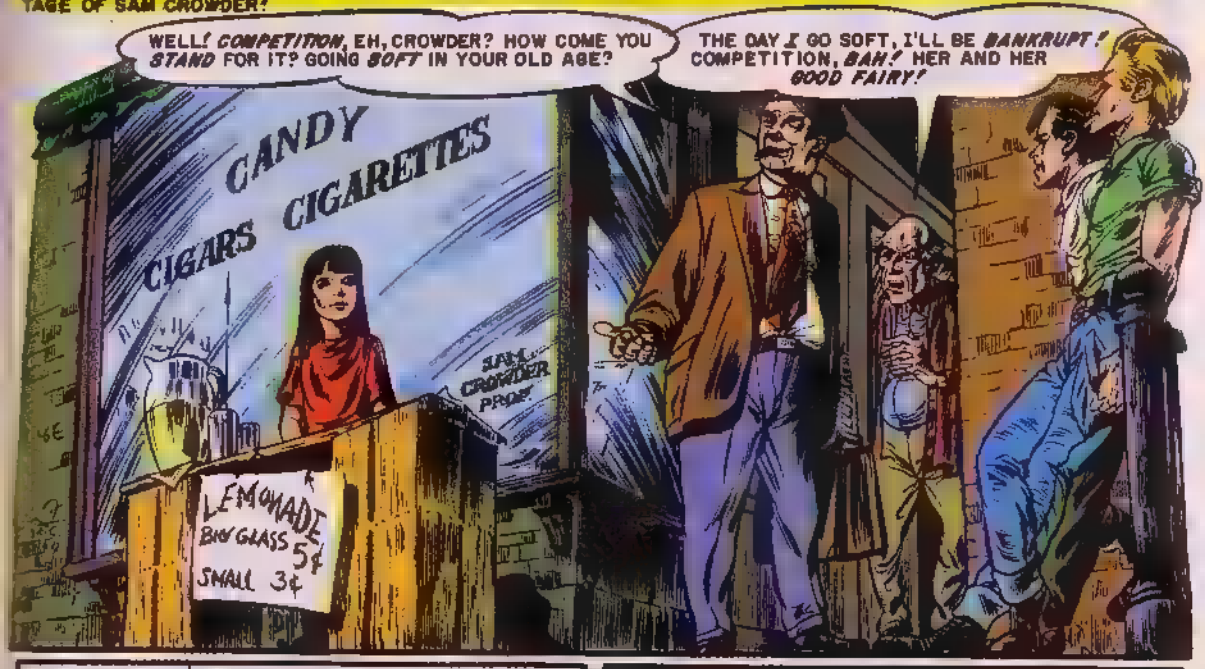
IT'S A *BEAUTIFUL* FACE, MILLIE, BECAUSE *I LOVE YOU* AND *I SEE ITS BEAUTY!* IT REFLECTS THE BEAUTY THAT IS *INSIDE* YOU! SO *DON'T COVER IT UP!* I WANT TO *LOOK AT IT*... *ALWAYS!*

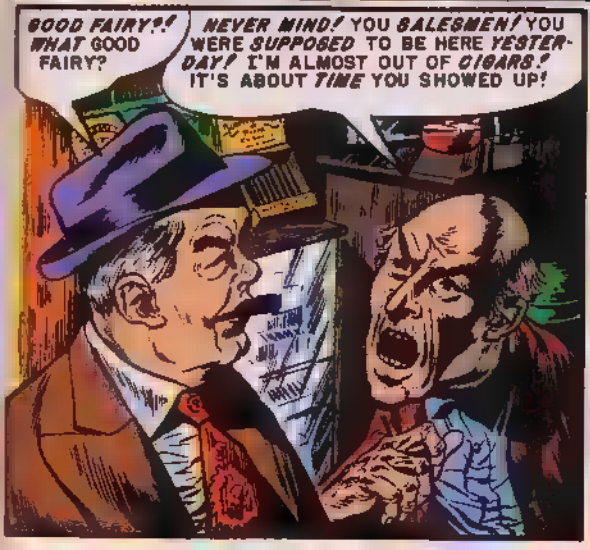
OH, JIM! *JIM!* I WAS THE ONE THAT WAS *REALLY BLIND!*

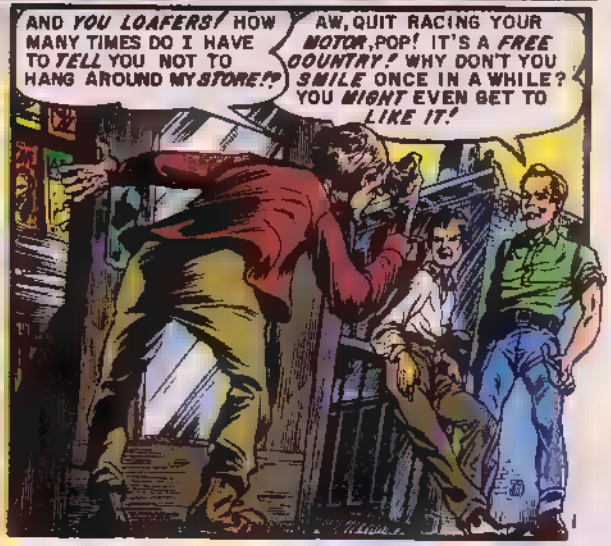
THE END

THE GOOD FAIRY

"CUTE!" THAT WAS WHAT HARRIS, THE TOBACCO SALESMAN, CALLED THE DIRTY-FACED KID. CUTE! THE FOOL! A LOT HE KNEW. AND SAM KNEW WHAT HARRIS WAS THINKING. IN HARRIS'S EYES, AND A LOT OF OTHERS, SAM CROWDER WAS A MEAN, PENNY-PINCHING OLD CRAB. AS IF SAM CARED WHAT THEY ALL THOUGHT! IN THE SLUMS, YOU PINCH PENNIES OR YOU STARVE! SO SAM WAS A MEAN OLD CRAB. HE EARNED A LIVING, DIDN'T HE? NOBODY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF SAM CROWDER!







I'LL TAKE A GLASS OF LEMONADE, ANNIE! MAKE IT A BIG ONE!
HMMPH...
THE COMPETITION SEEMS TO DO ALL RIGHT, CROWDER! I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'RE SORE! BUT AFTER ALL, A LITTLE GIRL...
SO WHAT IF SHE'S A LITTLE GIRL! YOU'RE JUST LIKE ALL THE REST! YOU NEVER THINK THAT I'VE GOT TO LIVE, TOO!
SAY! YOU REALLY ARE SORE! IF SHE'S CUTTING ON YOUR SODA FOUNTAIN BUSINESS THAT MUCH, HOW COME YOU HAVEN'T GOTTEN RID OF HER?
HOW COME!? DON'T YOU THINK I'VE TRIED!? I PAY TAXES! BUT DO I GET PROTECTION? NOT ME! A DIRTY-FACED KID COMES ALONG AND EVERYBODY GOES SOFT AS MUSH!
SPECIAL SUNDAE
BUT THE POLICE...
THE POLICE!? YOU THINK THAT'S THE ANSWER, EH? WELL LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE POLICE! THEY'RE ON HER SIDE! THEY HAVE BEEN... RIGHT FROM THE START!
THE POLICE! HAH! HARRIS WAS SO SMART, MAYBE HE COULD FIGURE IT OUT. SO SAM TOLD HIM THE WHOLE STORY... RIGHT FROM THAT MORNING TWO WEEKS BACK WHEN HE'D COME TO OPEN HIS STORE... AND THERE SHE'D BEEN...
WHAT THE...?
YOU... WHO TOLD YOU YOU COULD SELL LEMONADE HERE?
DOES SOMEBODY HAVE TO TELL HER, CROWDER? RELAX! YOU DON'T HAVE TO SCARE THE KID HALF TO DEATH! OR... DO YOU ENJOY BEING MEAN?
SEE? RIGHT OFF, SAM'D BEEN IN THE WRONG! SAM HAD A REPUTATION FOR BEING MEAN! WITHOUT IT, THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD MIGHT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HIM. BUT THAT MADE NO NEVER MIND...
PLEASE! I... I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS DOING ANYTHING WRONG...

I...I WON'T *BOTHER* ANYBODY! I...I JUST WANT TO EARN SOME *MONEY!* IT'S FOR *MOM!* SHE... SHE'S NOT *FEELING* SO GOOD... AND WE...WE HAVEN'T HAD MUCH *MONEY* SINCE DADDY DIED...

WELL, CROWDER? DO YOU WANT ME TO *RUN HER OFF?* YOU'RE WITHIN YOUR *RIGHTS* IF YOU DO! JUST SAY THE *WORD!* OR DO YOU THINK IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO ACT *HUMAN*...JUST *ONCE*...?

AS IF SAM HADN'T KNOWN WHAT MURPHY'D *REALLY* MEANT. A COP COULD MAKE PLENTY TROUBLE FOR YOU IF HE WANTED TO. BUT *THAT* WASN'T WHY SAM TURNED AWAY...

DID I *ASK* YOU?

P-PLEASE, MISTER... I...I CAN SEE THAT YOU'RE *MAD!* I DIDN'T *MEAN* TO MAKE YOU MAD...

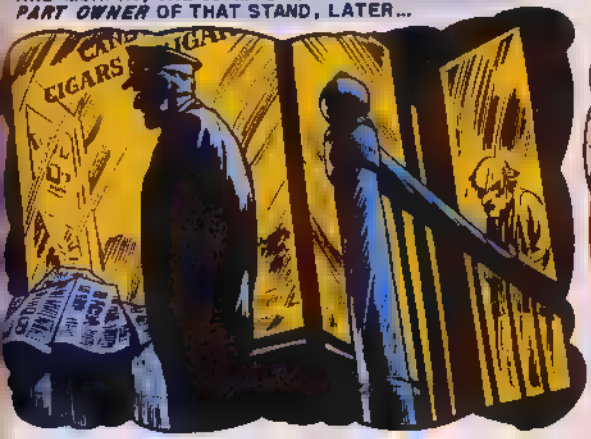
THE WAY THEY *GRINNED* AT SAM. IT WASN'T THAT THEY *CARED* ABOUT THE DIRTY KID! SAM *KNEW* THEM! THEY JUST DIDN'T LIKE *HIM!* THAT WAS *WHY* SAM HAD WALKED AWAY. YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THEM WHEN SAM HAD GONE INSIDE...

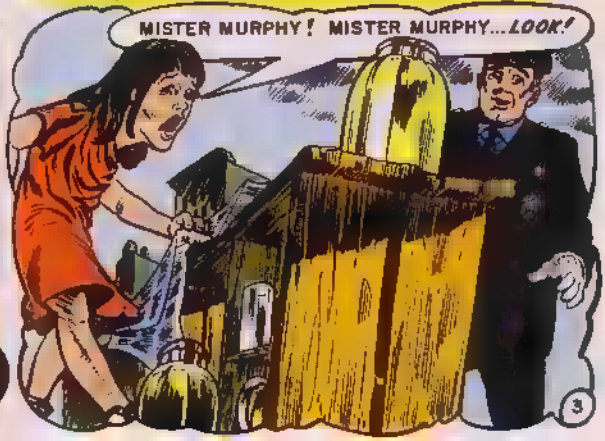
I'LL TAKE A *BIG GLASS,* LITTLE GIRL!

MAKE THAT *TWO* BIG GLASSES, KID!

THE KID...HER NAME WAS ANNIE...DID QUITE A BUSINESS! THEY BOUGHT FROM HER JUST TO *SPITE* SAM. AND MURPHY, THE COP...YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT HE WAS *PART OWNER* OF THAT STAND, LATER...

HE CHECKED ON THAT STAND LIKE IT WAS A *BANK!* AND NEXT MORNING, WHEN THAT "GOOD FAIRY" BUSINESS CAME UP, HE ACTED AS IF HE'D REALLY *BELIEVED* IT...





WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? WHAT'S ALL THE EXCITEMENT? WHAT ARE YOU TWO TRYING TO DO, RUIN MY BUSINESS COMPLETELY?
SIMMER DOWN, CROWDER! NOBODY'S TRYING TO HURT YOU!
ARETTES! CANDY
MISTER CROWDER... LOOK! MY LEMONADE JAR! IT'S... IT'S FULL!
SO IT'S FULL! SO WHAT!?
SO IT WASN'T FULL LAST NIGHT! ANNIE BROUGHT SOME MORE LEMONADE WITH HER, BUT, SHE DOESN'T NEED IT! THE WAY SHE FIGURES, A GOOD FAIRY CAME LAST NIGHT AND FILLED THE JAR FOR HER!
A... WHAT!?
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT, SO IT HADN'T BEEN THE RIGHT THING TO SAY. COULD YOU BLAME SAM FOR BEING SURPRISED? MURPHY DIDN'T HAVE TO GET SO MAD...
I SAID... A GOOD FAIRY, CROWDER! ANNIE'S SURE OF IT!
... AND SHE'S GOING TO STAY SURE! YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SPOIL THINGS FOR HER, CROWDER. UNDERSTAND? ONE WORD FROM YOU, AND...
AND WHAT DON'T YOU THREATEN ME! I KNOW MY RIGHTS! DON'T YOU MANHANDLE ME!
OKAY! JUST REMEMBER, CROWDER! MAYBE YOU'RE PROUD OF BEING THE MEANEST CHARACTER IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SPOIL THINGS FOR THAT KID!
MEAN, AM I?! HOW ELSE DO YOU GET ALONG IN THIS WORLD?
I SUPPOSE YOU'D LIKE ME TO GET ALL SOFT AND GOOEY, WOULDN'T YOU? WHEN YOU'RE SOFT, PEOPLE WALK ALL OVER YOU!
HOW WOULD YOU KNOW? JUST KEEP AWAY FROM THAT KID, CROWDER!

KEEP *AWAY!* SURE, SAM KEPT AWAY! BUT NOBODY *ELSE* DID! WORD GETS AROUND. EVERY MORNING, THERE IT WAS... A FULL PITCHER OF LEMONADE. THAT'S ALL SAM'S CUSTOMERS TALKED ABOUT...

SO *THAT'S* THE LITTLE GIRL! I WONDER WHO REALLY *DOES* FILL HER PITCHER FOR HER...

SO *YOU'VE* HEARD ABOUT HER *TOO!* FINE *THING,* ISN'T IT? YOU'D THINK THE LAW WOULD GIVE A MAN SOME *PROTECTION!* THE LITTLE *BRAT!* A LOT THE *LAW* CARES IF I LOSE MONEY...

HER AND HER *FAIRY TALES!* SHE PROBABLY FILLS THE PITCHER *HERSELF!* SHE'S *SMART! TOO SMART!* WHAT'LL IT BE?

IT WAS *GOING* TO BE *TWO ICE-CREAM SODAS,* BUT WE'VE *CHANGED* OUR *MINDS!*

TWO LEMONADES, LITTLE GIRL...

THE MORE SAM COMPLAINED, THE MORE HIS CUSTOMERS BOUGHT FROM THE KID. HAH! THEY CERTAINLY WERE EASY TO *FOOL*...

M-M-M! THAT SURE WAS *GOOD LEMONADE,* ANNIE!

OF *COURSE* IT WAS! ANYTHING THE *GOOD FAIRIES* MAKE JUST *HAS* TO BE GOOD!

SO THAT WAS THE STORY. SAM TOLD HARRIS, THE TOBACCO SALESMAN, THE WHOLE THING... AND THE WAY HARRIS LOOKED AT SAM, YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT SAM HAD *KILLED* SOMEONE...

SO... *THAT'S* WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT!

THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL *ABOUT!* AND *YOU* DON'T HAVE TO *LOOK* AT ME LIKE THAT!

IN *THIS* LIFE, YOU *MAKE SURE* THAT PEOPLE *KNOW* THEY *CAN'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOU*... IF YOU'RE *SMART!* AND *I'M SMART!*

YEAH... *SURE,* MISTER CROWDER! *SURE!*

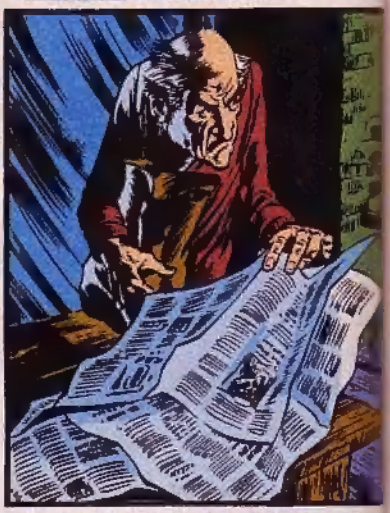
HARRIS DESPISED SAM *TOO!* IT WAS *OBVIOUS!* WELL, *LET HIM!* ONE THING WAS *CERTAIN!* HE'D NEVER TRY TO GET THE *BETTER* OF SAM! HE *KNEW* SAM'S REPUTATION! AND SAM KNEW THAT HARRIS WAS JUST TRYING TO *GET BACK* AT HIM WHEN HE LEFT AND STOPPED OUTSIDE...

A LOT SAM CARED *WHAT* HARRIS THOUGHT! BY CLOSING TIME, SAM HAD FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT HIM...

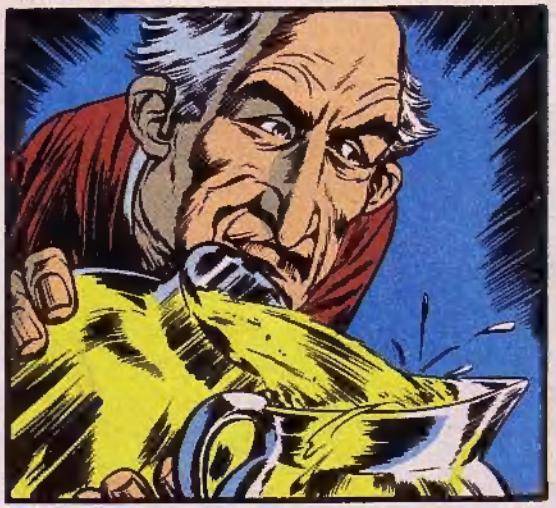
OUTSIDE, ANNIE WAS CLOSING DOWN HER STAND TOO, COVERING IT WITH PAPER. SAM SNICKERED. THAT MURPHY. HE EVEN WALKED ANNIE HOME NIGHTS. THE SENTIMENTAL IDIOT...

SAM LOCKED THE STORE AND WATCHED MURPHY AND ANNIE DISAPPEAR AROUND THE CORNER...

THEN HE MOVED STEALTHILY... WARILY... TO ANNIE'S LITTLE STAND... AND LIFTED THE PAPER...



...AND FILLED HER PITCHER WITH LEMONADE...



...AND WALKED ON HOME, SMILING INSIDE. WHO'D FIGURE *SAM* WAS THE ONE? EVERYONE *KNEW* SAM WASN'T THE KIND TO GO SOFT OVER A DIRTY-FACED KID! YES, *SAM* WAS *ANNIE'S GOOD FAIRY!* IT WAS THE *ONLY* WAY HE COULD *HELP* HER! *AFTER ALL!* HE HAD A *REPUTATION* TO MAINTAIN!

APPOINTMENT CANCELLED

David Holland was the kind of man whom people set their watches by. He was a teller in the bank and his life was as regulated as the bank audits. The schedule never varied. Up at seven, breakfast at seven-fifteen, catch the seven-thirty bus, reach the bank at eight-five, and enter through the side door at eight-six. Morning after morning. Day after day, through a lot of days, twenty years of them.

Nobody in town knew anything about him. He'd been hired by old Mr. Dunker and when the old man had died, David stayed on as a fixture. Everybody knew him. He knew everybody—yet, he was a stranger. The town was small and prosperous. There were no secrets. People knew all the skeletons in everybody's closet. But not David's. Actually, no one believed there was anything to know. A man reached sixty and all the years behind him were a void.

The folks figured that old Mr. Dunker knew, but he was dead, so they took David for granted, and set their watches by him. Then, one day, a man turned up. A seedy man in his late fifties. He was sitting on the porch of Mrs. Green's boarding house, where David lived. As David came up the steps, he stared at the other man.

"Luke," he said. "What do you want?"

"That's no way to greet a friend," Luke said. "I'll be brief. I need money. You'll get it for me—or else tomorrow the whole town is going to know about you."

"But that was so long ago, Luke," David said.

"People in this kind of a town don't care. They won't have a jailbird handling their money."

David sighed. "All right, Luke. I don't know how you found me. But you're here. The only man living who knows the truth about me. I was a forger, I served time. But for twenty years, I've been straight. Dunker knew, but he gave me a chance. Maybe the others won't. What do you want?"

"Meet me by the monument, at ten o'clock. We'll talk then," Luke said. He rose and walked away, swallowed by the gloom.

David went to his room. He sat a long time. At last, he opened a drawer and took out a revolver. He put it in his pocket, sat on the bed thinking. Suddenly, he was snapped out of his reverie. The clock of the North Street Church was tolling ten.

He hurried towards the monument, late for an appointment for the first time in twenty years. As he approached the square, he saw a crowd milling around at the base of the monument. Pushing his way through, he looked down at Luke, who was lying crushed and bleeding.

"What happened?" David asked.

A man said, "He was running across the street, a car hit him. Hit and run driver. He's hurt bad. Happened a few minutes after ten. Wondered what would make a man run against traffic like that?"

"Maybe he was late for an appointment," David said.

He walked to the bridge that spanned the river and threw the revolver into it, after leaving the hospital where they had brought Luke. He wouldn't need it any more. Death had cancelled the appointment. For once, he was glad that he had been late . . .